

My name is Liz Milwe and I live in Westport Ct, where we have had a successful bag ban for five years.

In 2009, a very forward-thinking constituent from my district, Mel Sorcher, approached me about banning plastic bags in Westport Ct. He had been visiting his family in San Francisco where a ban on plastic bags had been recently implemented. He and his friend Don Wergeles, a resident of Weston Ct, had started to research the hazards of plastic bags and had contacted the local government in San Francisco for more information on the ban. By the time I met with them in a local coffee shop in Westport, (date) they had already accumulated piles of research concerning the hazard of plastic bags in our waterways. As they handed their research off to me and to my RTM colleague Gene Seidman, the campaign to ban plastic bags in our town began.

I wondered about the success of other bans in the US and around the world. As it turned out, the person in charge of implementing the ban in San Francisco was a graduate of Staples High School in Westport, CT. He sent me the ordinance passed in San Francisco, and we modeled our own ordinance after theirs. I started contacting people around the world to find out how they accomplished banning plastic bags in their communities. I learned that in 2003 in Coles Bay, Australia, local citizens were appalled by the amount of plastic shopping bags left lying around on the beach and in their beautiful seaside town after a holiday weekend. After a massive local cleanup, Ben Kearney, a local storeowner, had the idea to spearhead a ban on plastic bags. Coles Bay became the first town in Australia to become plastic free. Over in England, Rebecca Hosking read about Ben Kearney. Rebecca was a filmmaker working for the BBC. After working on a film about baby albatrosses in Hawaii dying from eating plastic bag particles in the Pacific Ocean, she came back to her hometown on the Devon Coast of England and met with local merchants to ban plastic bags. She succeeded, and Ninety-three towns in England followed suit.

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In a small town of Paia on the island of Maui, Heather Riley, a life-long surfer, became aware of the plastic waste in the ocean after seeing plastic floating all around her while she was competing in windsurf races around the world. She met with local artists, and together they designed town-wide reusable bags for Paia, which they gave free-of-charge to local merchants. Paia is now plastic free, and in 2010, the entire Island of Maui banned plastic bags.

On average, you use a plastic shopping bag for *12 minutes*—and then you throw it away. Plastic bags are part of the problem – they can never be part of the solution. And the sad thing is, you can't ever really throw one away. In landfills, the ones we have all over our beautiful state, plastic bags don't biodegrade; they'll sit there for a 1,000 years. They become a problem for the next generation, and the generation after that, and so on... On the surface, in sun or in water, it's even worse. The bags break down, all right, but into tiny toxic plastic pellets that are ingested by birds and sea life. Again, I have to ask, why would we tax a product that can be easily replaced by a washable reusable bag? We aren't we here to support the better alternative.

Just recently, the entire state of California banned plastic bags. Today, in our town of Westport, in the largest grocery store, over 50 percent of the shoppers bring in their reusable bags. Do you know how many did this before the ban? About 1%! Westport Ct. has made a difference. Together, our community had taken a stand on something we believe in.

I hope the Connecticut legislation will take a stand and ban plastic bag in the State of Connecticut. The merchants have not complained in Westport and our town is truly proud.

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